Editorial

FUTURE OF HEALTH CARE AND OUR READINESS

Imdad A. Khushk, Zafar Fatmi and Ghulam Ali Memon

Change has always been occurring throughout history, but today the rate of change has greatly accelerated and the world has become a smaller place and more dangerous. Isolation is no longer an option in today's world. Science and technology expansion continues and will further advance. Diversity is becoming more pronounced; not accommodating differences which leads to dissension and even war. Terrorism is a real threat everywhere in the world. New diseases like West Nile virus and SARS continue to arise.

Economic realities are controlling health care services. Communication technologies are expanding, allowing broader access and more depth in information available.[1,2]

Scientific and technological advances portend significant changes for health care, which is a basic human right. Twentieth century set the foundation for the improvement of health care but in the twenty-first century health care systems confront an uncertain and troubling future throughout the world.[3]

Biotechnology research is dramatically influencing health care, and the pharmaceutical industry in particular. In the coming decades, this influence may further grow. Health outcomes may be improved in a cost-effective manner through the ability to selectively prescribe medications; safer, more effective treatment may reduce long-term health care costs.[4] As genetic intervention becomes the standard of care, new challenges will surface around how genetic information will be used or misused, and how and where health care is spent.

The hope for eradicating entire diseases via genetic engineering is within the range of possibilities in the near future. What will this mean for healthcare professionals, pharmaceutical and equipment companies, and hospitals? Few of us remember the polio epidemic. Eradication of small pox is another example.

The National Cancer Institute of United States of America reports that a biologic therapy for melanoma is proving effective in early clinical trials.[5] They predict similar vaccines for breast, ovarian, and prostate cancers may be available by the end of current decade. Might entire medical professionals be put out of business?

Robotic scalpels and microcameras are allowing access to internal systems for biopsy procedures or surgery with less trauma. Advanced tests on a single drop of blood now yield complicated and sophisticated results, relieving the need for more extensive and traumatic testing. Designed originally for industrial uses, nanotechnology promises exciting possibilities for disease treatment. Scientists predict that nanoinventions will be able to serve as transportation vehicles to direct medication at the cellular level. Furthermore, step-by-step animation software (Graphing surgery) showing surgical procedures has been created for patients to use to understand their surgery before they consent to it. The innovators developed the program to help reduce malpractice costs, but training physicians and nurses is another potential use.[6] Geographic boundaries no longer restrict communication or information and lock-step, one-size-fits-all education no longer makes sense. Therefore, university structures, both actual buildings and governance models, may become obsolete in the future.

Future is coming and all of these changes will affect health care, either directly or indirectly. In this regard, different approaches are being followed in different parts of world which include modernising services through incentives; making the consumer a partner by focusing on consumer-related outcomes; building employee networks that encourage responsibility and problem solving; making healthcare an attractive labour market; and creating self-employment opportunities in the healthcare market to increase efficiency and emphasis on consumer satisfaction.[7]

But are we ready for future of heath care and its challenges? what we have done in this regard? And are we moving ahead? These are some serious questions to which we must critically think and work specially in Pakistani perspective .

Though future is always unknown, we must not ignore it as not preparing for the future, puts an individual, a group, or a profession, for that matter, at a disadvantage.

Today's rapidly changing world demands fresh ideas and alternative solutions to emerging problems,

though looking at the future is not easy. To keep ahead of the future challenges, we must consider all the possibilities and probabilities by using available information and creative ideas; understanding benefits and concerns raised by genetics, information, solar and environmental technologies and take advantage of increasing diversity in the world to craft a preferred future. In this regard, we should examine our health care related systems and see whether these are organized properly with focus on public health and research? What are problems with them? ....and what kind of the reforms are required to solve these problems? Regardless, the strategy for future involves recognizing countless possibilities, weighing the options and selecting a clear course of action.

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Correspondence:
Dr. Imdad A. Khushk
Associate Editor, JLUMHS
Resident, Department of Community Health Sciences
The Aga Khan University, Karachi, Pakistan.
E-mail: khushk01@yahoo.com